

Atari
Computer
Club
Encompassing
Suburban
Sacramento



THE ACCESS KEY

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 12 DECEMBER 1987

GENERAL MEETING

23 DECEMBER
SMUD BUILDING
6201 S STREET
7:30 P.M.

GENERAL MEETING

6 JANUARY
SAME PLACE
SAME TIME

***** THE AGENDA *****

DEMONSTRATIONS:

The Season's new
Software for

Atari 8-Bit
&
Atari ST
Computers

(Bring along your new
games & give everyone
a try-out!)

RAFFLE:

Your choice from
the Raffle Table!

* * NOTE! * *

NOW FIRST WEDNESDAY!

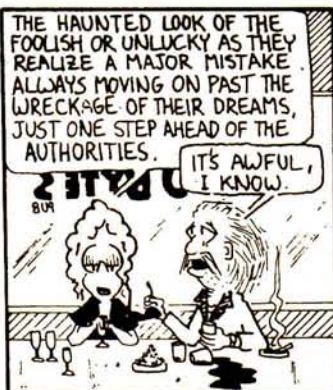
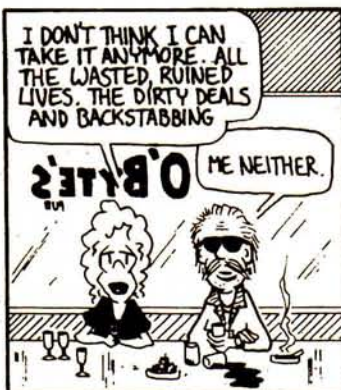
***** THE AGENDA *****

RANDOM ACCESS:

General Discussion
Questions & Answers
Help session

RAFFLE:

Your choice from
the Raffle Table!





CLUB NOTES

By Kim Beattie

A.C.C.E.S.S.

Well it's finally done. The Constitution and Bylaws are written and the Club ratified them at the November meeting. Your Club now has it's first set of organizational documents. I think you'll find them very complete and thorough. We spent a year on them, so they should be fairly complete. How many of you noticed the self-destruct clause? Take a look at Article VII, Section 5, Paragraph (d). Think about it.

The paper drive is doing quite well. Dale has had a good load each time these last two months. Keep those newspapers coming. Please remember that it is only newspapers. Thanks! Looking through an exchange newsletter, I see that another Atari User Group has started a paper drive. A coincidence? Sure it is...

Remember that starting in January 1988, we will be meeting on the FIRST Wednesday of the month. This change was made necessary because SMUD didn't give us first dibs on our normal meeting night. "First come, first served" and we were just a little bit too late to get our regular night. Thanks a lot SMUD. Mark it on your new 1988 calendars, the FIRST Wednesday of January will be the 6th.

The December meeting looks like it will be a survey of the new software available for both the 8-bit and ST computers. We are going to try and show as many of the new programs as possible. Here's where you can help us. If you have a new program for your computer (8-bit or ST) bring it to the December meeting and show it to us.

Because the January meeting is only two weeks after the December meeting, we are planning on having a "open format" meeting. In other words, nothing is planned. The disk libraries will be there, and we should have both computers there as well. This will be a good time to just wander around and talk. This kind of meeting always seems to be the most

successful and popular. Come and have fun talking about your computer with people who care!

Burn out. We've all heard about it. We've all seen it happen before, right in our very own Club. Burn out is when one person (or a few persons) try to do it all. I'm close to burning out. I've been very active in the Club since I joined, and I've been an officer almost as long. It's been fun, but the thrill is gone. Writing for the newsletter is no longer fun. I wait until the last second and then pound something out. Writing should be fun, not a chore. I'm not the only officer close to burning out. Take a look at your other officers. Do they seem to be a little less enthusiastic? I don't know about them, but I've reached my limit. Oh, I'll remain an officer, that's for sure, but I won't be taking on any new responsibilities. I'll still write the occasional article for the newsletter, but don't expect to see my byline every month. I intend to step back a little and take a break. Let's see some new faces with new ideas step forward to lend a hand. Elections for Directors will be in April. It's not too early to start thinking about where you want your Club to go.

That wraps it up for this month. See you at the December meeting. Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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FUTURE CLUB MEETINGS

ST SIG 11 January

(Call Dave at 944-1291)

MODERN USERS SIG: 5 January

(Call Kim at 338-1631)

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE: 8 January

GENERAL MEETINGS: 23 Dec, 6 Jan
3 Feb, 2 Mar

(THE XEP80, Cont.)

Returning to the question of monitors - and this is one of the two crucial issues if you are considering the purchase of any 80-column device - you will need an el cheapo green or amber monitor. Sound capability is probably a waste of money. The monitor needs to have a large, well-defined border around the background (playfield to those who are into gaming). Otherwise some of the text is in danger of being lost off the screen. The vertical adjustment must be easy to reach and manipulate. You will be doing vertical adjusting every time you switch between regular display and the XEP80. If you plan to buy an XEP80, first test drive one on your system and/or the monitor you will be using with it.

Who can benefit from 80-column screen capability? People who handle lots of alpha/numeric text. Word processors, file managers, spread sheeters, programmers, text adventure writers and players, modem users. If you don't fit into one of these categories, don't waste your time and money on the XEP80.

Here is the second crucial issue. Where is the software that runs on 80 columns? Mostly it doesn't exist. Yet. An 80-column version of AtariWriter is promised, along with one or two other pieces of productivity software. My personal opinion is that little or no commercial software will ever be marketed for the XEP80. The market just does not perceive any profit in it.

How about existing commercial software? Sorry. Most of it won't work. The problem is the dread AUTORUN.SYS! A fearsome monster! Every software developer who ever lived loves AUTORUN.SYS with a grand, passionate devotion. Most commercial software boots as AUTORUN.SYS, as does the software that drives the XEP80. Just as the inflexible law of physics states that two solid objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time, so two AUTORUN.SYS files cannot exist on a single disk. Ergo, almost no commercial software is available to run on the XEP80.

Of course, there are ways to get around the problem. For example, if the commercial software is on disk and in some accessible language and is not tied strictly to a 40-column display and has some free disk space, then it can be spliced to the XEP80 software driver. And there are users who will do that splicing. And you shall surely hear screams of pain issuing forth from the lips of software developers who have absolutely no intention of serving the consumer with software patches or upgrades. And accusations of piracy will be heard abroad in the Valley of Silicon. And there will come to pass laws to punish Atarians for their sinful attempts to improve inadequate software. By and large, commercial software is not the path to true salvation.

HOWEVER... There is a sizable slug of productivity software sitting out there in the public domain. It's waiting to be converted to 80 columns. I have no doubt that some of it will surface on bulletin boards and in club disk libraries during the next six months. Software for the XEP80, like software for the modem, will in fact be mostly public domain.

With several capable word processors, a couple of good data bases, a barely adequate spread sheet, and some bits and pieces of financial programs already existing in public domain, there should be little problem in establishing a body of 80-column programs.

To sum up, the String One (8-bit) Atari family can take care of most home productivity tasks. However, one has to work to make it happen. The XEP80 is no exception. The fundamentals are easy to learn. But at this writing, the XEP80 is still a hacker's toy. It will remain so until software is developed in the public domain. If nothing else, it may force some Atarians to rethink their choice of monitor for text-heavy applications.



ST PUBLIC DOMAIN

A Hitchhiker's Guide to DCOPY
By Kim Beattie

DCOPY, written by Ralph Walden, is probably the single most useful utility to be written for the ST to date. At the risk of being cliché, it would be easier to tell you what DCOPY can't do, rather than list all of its many features, but I'm still going to list them for you just so you can see how powerful this program really is.

DCOPY can:

- >LIST or SEARCH a directory,
- >COPY, MOVE, ERASE, LOCK, RENAME, HIDE, UNLOCK/UNHIDE files.
- >TYPE (display) a file.
- >FORMAT a disk.
- >DUPLICATE (image copy) a disk.
- >CREATE or DELETE folders.
- >ARC/DE-ARC files.
- >CONVERT text files between 8-bit and 16-bit formats.

All of this in a file that's about 23K long. Pretty good programming, huh?

The TYPE command will display a text file to the screen and format it to the screen width you set. You can then page through the file, forward or backwards. You can also search for a string within the file. This feature makes reading text files, documentation, or ZMAG on screen very easy.

DCOPY also offers a complete list of ARC features: ARC, DE-ARC (extract), or VIEW the contents of an ARC file. EXTRACT with INQUIRY allows you to remove only one file from within an ARC file. You can also DELETE, FRESHEN, UPDATE, or TEST a file within an ARC file. DCOPY's ARC features are fast too. Faster than ARC.TTP or ARCX.TTP.

Another nice feature of DCOPY is its ability to convert text files from one format to another. It will convert 16-bit ASCII files to 8-bit ASCII files, and vice versa. It will convert a ST WRITER file into a 16-bit or 8-bit text (ASCII) file. These features make your newsletter Editor's job much easier.

You can also check space free on a disk, change the default directory path, and turn the disk drive write verify on/off.

DCOPY does it all. About the only thing DCOPY isn't is GEM. That's right, no pointing and clicking, DCOPY is a TOS program. The lack of GEM features in DCOPY is no real loss. After working with DCOPY for a while, you won't even miss GEM. And leaving GEM out is one of the reasons DCOPY is such small, fast, and powerful program.

So what are you waiting for? If you own a ST, you deserve DCOPY. It will make using your ST so much easier.

DCOPY is shareware, so if you like it, send Ralph the \$5 he's asking for it. The price is cheap and we really should encourage Ralph to give us more exciting programs like DCOPY.

DCOPY: Don't boot up without it!



"I don't have my homework. My computer ate it."

(THINKING, Cont.)

Is there a crisis at home?" Add a snail-swift starburst display that cycles through the six colors available on an Apple II, and it can take three minutes to answer "16/8= ".

Optimal responses are "RIGHT" or "CORRECT" for the right answer; a display of the right answer for errant responses. For teachers wedded to Skinner Box learning theory, why not go all the way back to the source? If you must reward correct responses, try this: When a student answers five questions correctly, a peripheral hooked up to the computer dispenses an M&M into a tray within her/his reach. Hey! It works with pigeons. Why not with people?

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NFL QUIZ

Here are the answers to last month's NFL Quiz. But you don't need them, do you?

- 1 Atlanta
- 2 St. Louis
- 3 Detroit
- 4 San Diego
- 5 Pittsburgh
- 6 Los Angeles (AFC)
- 7 Tampa Bay
- 8 Chicago
- 9 New Orleans
- 10 Los Angeles (NFC)
- 11 Indianapolis
- 12 Cleveland
- 13 Washington
- 14 New York (NFC)
- 15 San Francisco
- 16 Denver
- 17 New England
- 18 New York (AFC)
- 19 Cincinnati
- 20 Minnesota
- 21 Kansas City
- 22 Dallas
- 23 Houston
- 24 Miami
- 25 Green Bay
- 26 Philadelphia
- 27 Buffalo
- 28 Seattle

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THE NEW XF551 DRIVE

(Part of a discussion on CompuServe concerning Atari's new disk drive for 8-bit computers - the one that is to replace the 1050.)

Sb: #191440-XF551

Fm: Bill Wilkinson [OSS] 73177,2714

To: Mark Newton-John 76137,2701 (X)

Yes, it is 18 sectors per track, just the same as PERCOM, INDUS, HAPPY, USDoubler, RANA, TRAK, AMDEK, and whoever else I accidentally left out.

Only big difference: it is double sided (like ASTRA and some of the old PERCOMs).

Why not 26 sectors of 256 bytes each? There isn't room. Literally.

The data bits are (and must be) written to the disk at a speed of approx. 4 microseconds per bit. The current controllers can't handle a variation in that speed of more than about 10%.

If the disk turns at 300 RPM (288 for an Atari drive, actually, but let's use 300 since almost everybody else in the industry does), how many bits--and hence bytes--can you write on one track?

DON'T PEEK.

IN THEORY (!!!!) It comes out to about 50,000 bits, or 6,250 bytes, or 24 sectors at 256 bytes per sector.

IN THEORY.

In practice, every sector has approximately 100 bytes worth of overhead (address marks, address/data separation, space between sectors, etc.), so that comes out to 17.6 sectors per track.

The floppy controller manufacturers tell you (in their specifications) that you should use only 16 sectors (of 256 bytes) per track, so you can see that Atari is actually pushing the limit at 18.

Get the idea?

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